EDUCATING FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

Drawing by S. J. Woolf

By ANDREW CARNEGIE

IT has often been said that nowadays there is a tendency for the land to become more and more the property of the many, under the free play of economic laws. The great ranches of the West, the big plantations of the South, and the large farming and timber tracts of the North have been undergoing a process of change, as a result of which a number of separate individuals have taken the place of the former solitary proprietor as the owners of thousandfarm properties. More and more it is the day of the small holder of land. Even in the suburbs of our great cities the number of individual home owners has increased greatly, as witness the development in the territory adjacent to New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, Baltimore, and elsewhere.

Perhaps there is no question more important than this in the entire range of social problems; for the triumph of the small proprietor over the large one makes for the growth and maintenance of that element in society upon which our civilization can most surely depend. The principle has special application to our farming population. There is probably no other force in the nation so conservative of all that is good, fair, and virtuous as that issuing from those owning the soil they till. These constitute one grand division of the army of workers, and a very important one indeed.

There is another vast group, the industrial, those who labor in the manufacturing field. Here is an immense army of men and women who are swayed by an entirely different law, one tending toward the concentration of industry and business affairs generally in a comparatively few vast establishments. It is only by the concentration of labor in this way that there has come about the cheapening process, which has produced the fall in prices of manufactured articles.

If our huge factories were divided into a number of smaller establishments, it would have been impossible for this country to have achieved its unique position as a manufacturer. There nowhere appears to be any counteracting force to this law of concentration in the world of industry. Indeed, there are forces in action which appear to demand a greater and ever increasing output from each establishment, in order that the minimum of cost be reached. Cost is largely a question of quantity of product.

THIS phenomenon in late years has given rise to a complaint often heard on the lips of young men, who say that it is no longer possible for a man working for a salary, and without capital, to rise to an independent position. According to this argument there are obstacles which prevent such men from reaching a partnership in the firm or a place of independence. Chief of these are the huge establishments already in existence, it is claimed, which are impassable barriers to advancement.

There is no foundation for such a belief. As already stated, the man who is engaged in agricultural pursuits has nothing to fear from capital. It is comparatively easy for him to save or borrow the modest amount necessary to begin farming operations. The only competition to be feared is that of others of that class, similarly situated. And this is simply the spur which ought to drive a man on to success.

As to the young man engaged in industry, it may be difficult for, say, a mechanic or practical worker to establish an entirely new business for himself, but not to win a partnership in a great firm already in existence, or shares of stock in a company; these are easier than before. This should stimulate the ambitious man, and it should never be lost sight of that if the race in the industrial and business world be difficult to win, the rewards are infinitely great in proportion.

Before considering the prospects of the mechanic in the industrial realm, or of the clerk in the mercantile and financial worlds, let us remember that no other classes have had so much to do with establishing the factories, business houses, and financial institutions which are best known today in the United States.

Out of a score of great manufacturing establishments, including some which have already been merged with our great industrial corporations, everyone was originally founded and managed by mechanics, men who had served their apprenticeship and risen to independence. Among these may be mentioned the founders of the original Baldwin Locomotive Works, Fairbanks' scales, Studebakers' wagons, Pullman's cars, Sloane's and Higgins' carpets, Westinghouse's electrical apparatus, Singer's and Howe's sewing machines, Woods' agricultural implements, Cramp's and Scott's steamships, Ames' shovels, and Steinway's and Chickering's pianos.

It would be a comparatively simple matter to extend the list indefinitely if we should include all those business establishments which were created by men who entered on their careers as office boys or clerks. Almost every famous manufacturing concern in the country would come under this category. For example, Edison began as a telegraph operator, Corliss in the great engine works now bearing his name, Cheney in the Cheney Silk Mills, Roebling in the firm of wire manufacturers of the same name, Spreckels in the sugar refinery bearing his name. All these men, and many more captains of industry, were poor boys with natural aptitudes, for whom a regular apprenticeship was scarcely necessary.

The condition is similar in the mercantile, commercial, and financial branches of business, in all of which the governing principle tends toward concentration in the form of large concerns. In these the poor clerk stands in the same relation as the trained mechanic in the industrial world. The original members of Lord & Taylor in New York, Field in Chicago, Wanamaker in Philadelphia, Barr of St. Louis, the Phelps Dodge concern, and others were all poor boys and clerks at the outset. And the same condition is true in the banking world, where, as everybody remembers, the Seligmans, Huntingtons, Goulds, and others started out as poor lads, and received their training in that sternest but most efficient of all schools, Poverty. Messrs. Nash of the Corn Exchange Bank, Cannon of the Fourth National, and Baker of the First National in New York City began at the foot of the ladder.

AS the names of these leaders in business and industrial affairs pass before us in review it will be observed that there is small evidence of the college graduate among them. There is an excellent reason for this, and that is that the actual prize winners in industry and commerce entered the race as youngsters, engaging hotly in the hard battle of practical achievement that is required for enduring triumphs.

Of course a college education for young men in training for the learned professions is indispensable nowadays for the average young man; but the almost total absence of the university graduate from a high position in the business world seems to justify the conclusion that a college education, as it is given today, does not contribute to leadership in the domain of business affairs. The reason, as pointed out, is plain, the college graduate having a handicap in entering the office or counting room at the age of twenty, as against the boy who began as shipping clerk when only fourteen. It is true that there are a few sons of business men who are college graduates and succeed in managing a business already created; but these are only a handful in comparison with those who fail to increase or even keep intact the fortunes handed down to them.

In recent years there has been a notable development in the educational field, particularly in the polytechnic and scientific schools for boys. These institutions have been turning out scientifically trained youths who have an important advantage over the apprenticed mechanic,—open-mindedness and absence of prejudice. These young men on going to work will adopt the latest invention or newest method, always trying to hit on a plan that will beat the former record, and ready to discard their own earlier devices. This is a step which the working mechanic, on the other hand, is loath to take. Accordingly no young man should underrate the advantages of an education, except that it must be adapted to the end in view, giving practical help bearing directly on one's career, if success is really to be won.

From the foregoing I think it will be plain why it is that in the financial, commercial, and mercantile branches of business, as well as in manufacturing, the poor office boy often becomes the merchant prince or banking leader of the succeeding generation. The law here works the same as in the case of the trained mechanic who eventually becomes the founder and manager of some famous manufacturing concern. Men of this type have abandoned salaried positions and boldly risked all in the establishment of a business, finally risen to the top, and at last taken supreme command in their respective fields. In all these lines it will often be found that there are college graduates working on salaries as trusted subordinates; but in general hitherto it has remained true that neither capital, influence, nor college learning has proved adequate to contend against the energy and indomitable will springing from all-conquering poverty which finally leads on to fortune in business affairs.

What I have here said is addressed especially to the fortunate poor young men who have to earn a living. For those who can afford to obtain a university degree and possess sufficient means to insure them a livelihood, I would be the last person to advise against college training; but for the poor lad the earning of a competence is the first duty, and duty done is worth even more than a university education, desirable as that is.

While speaking of the advantages of a liberal education, it should not be forgotten that this gives a man who really absorbs it very much higher tastes and aims than the mere acquisition of wealth; something, in short, very different from what the mere millionaire has experienced. Therefore, to find that a college education is not usually the best training for business may prove its claim to a higher function; for we must not overlook the fact that a true education of the faculties can sometimes be obtained outside the schools. Genius of course is not a plant to be found only in academic groves. It is above all rules, and does what it must.

RANKING all the advantages accruing to the practical young man working today at the bench or behind the counter, some may be disposed to conclude that even so it is almost impossible to start out in business now on one's own account. There is something to be said for this point of view, and it is decidedly more difficult to start a new business of any kind nowadays